Library of the
PACIFIC UNITARIAN SCHOOL
FOR THE MINISTRY
Berkeley, California

IDEAL SUBSTITUTES FOR GOD,

CONSIDERED IN

An Opening Lecture

AT

MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, LONDON,

NINETY-THIRD SESSION, 1878-9.

BY

JAMES MARTINEAU, LL.D., D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF THE COLLEGE.

THIRD EDITION.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,

14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;
AND 20, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.

1879.

IDEAL SUBSTITUTES FOR GOD,

CONSIDERED IN

An Opening Lecture

AT

MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, LONDON,

NINETY-THIRD SESSION, 1878-9.

BY

JAMES MARTINEAU, LL.D., D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF THE COLLEGE.

THIRD EDITION.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,

14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;
AND 20, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.

1879.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY C. GREEN AND SON,
178, STRAND.

IDEAL SUBSTITUTES FOR GOD.

THIS College has always professed, as the crown of all its work, freely to teach Theology; and, in a recent Memorial to the Government, has prayed that, in every teaching University of the kingdom, provision be made for unfettered theological study, with appropriate honours, as a means of "developing the noblest branch of human learning" and "fostering the moral and spiritual elevation of the community." What then is "*Theology*," with which our life here is bound up, and of which we have ventured to speak as experienced representatives? The word itself, belonging as it does to a well-known group of compounds, indicates its own central conception. As Geology is the methodical knowledge of the earth's crust,—Physiology, of living organisms,—Psychology, of the self-conscious mind, —Ethnology, of the races of mankind,—so is Theology the doctrine or rational apprehension of *God*. He is its object; and those who teach it assume that our faculties can take cognizance of Him, no less than the Kosmologist assumes that he can intelligently construe the variety and unity of the world. The *methods* of seeking Him have indeed changed with the genius of the thinker and the temper of

his age. But whether he has proceeded (with Descartes) from the Idea to the infinite Reality, or (with Wolff) from the contingency of the universe to its necessary Source, or (with Paley) from the skill and beauty of nature to its intellectual Inventor, or (with Kant) from the moral law to its righteous Legislator, or (with Chalmers) from the records of past revelations to the character of the Revealer, —in every instance the light from afar which has sustained the inquirer's zeal has been still the same—the assured *Divine knowledge* in which the toil shall end. This is the inspiration of Theology; and if that living breath departs, it collapses and dies.

By watching the gradual change in the choice and complexion of words, we gain a kind of Nilometer, which shows the shifting levels and gathering floods of thought, and warns us of the season's work. And it is not without significance that, in place of what used to be called the study of *Theology*, we now more often hear of the "Science of *Religions*," i.e. the systematic knowledge of what *men have believed and felt* on things sacred to them. The difference is obvious: it drops us down from a Divine to a Human object, from the yearning of Reason after its transcendent Reality to the history and critique of ethnic mythologies. As an element in the study of man, rich in psychological instruction, there is every ground for welcoming the new expansion recently given to this order of inquiries, and for rendering all honour to the leaders who open the way through them. And the treatment of them in the pure historical spirit, unperverted by theoretic preconceptions or apologetic interests, places them for the first

time in their true position: for, as long as ancient and foreign religions had no reporter but the Christian theologian, it was vain to expect for them a sympathy adequate to their interpretation. Still, the importance of these studies is wholly anthropological. They tell the grotesque and pathetic story of our struggling race,—the dreams of its darkness, the guesses of its wonder, the surmises of its sin; but supply no selective rule for saving the true while pitying the false, and yield no Divine knowledge but what we bring to them. If, in pursuing them, we are already and independently furnished with our theology, they will reflect perhaps some rays of it here and there, and so adorn it with a fresh illustration; but, in themselves, they will merely pass before us strange forms of thought, on which we gaze as from an outside station, and which we treat only as phenomena of the world. They cannot therefore claim the place of the old "Theology."

Whence this change in the aspect and method of religious theory? Why has it parted with its Infinite Object, and taken up instead with men's poor fancies about it? Can the broken lights of primeval superstitions render a truer image of things Divine than immediate intellectual vision? Have we really come to that last resort of superannuated philosophy, an eclectic commonplace-book of favourite beliefs? No doubt, the reason is, that our age finds it easier to feel sure of what Religion *is* in man, than of what it *says* of God; and can treat it therefore with tenderness and respect as a subjective phenomenon, but hesitates to follow its daring launch-out on to the ocean of real being. Its power as an element of character, as an

inspiration in art, as a federator of nations and factor of history, is freely admitted; and no place that it can fairly claim in the genesis of society and the regulation of life is denied to it. But that it knows its own meaning, and that that meaning is true; that what it sees is really there and no phantasm of the mind; that, when its mythical drapery is stripped off, anything substantive remains within;—on all this our generation, dazzled by its discoveries and deserted by its simplicity, feels bewildered and insecure. Yet we are naturally averse to supposing that mere emptiness and illusion can have a dominant influence in the education of mankind: so we try to find some solid little nucleus secreted at the centre of this brilliant nebula, and to make out that, if *we* could not lodge there now, it has belonged, or is going to belong, to some less erratic and more habitable world; and we insist that, though in itself it cannot pretend to much reality, it may symbolically stand for a good deal, if we do but construe it aright. We readily perceive that the higher forms of Religion assume (inter alia) some rule of human experience, e.g. that *the wicked lay snares for themselves;* or some attitude of the moral consciousness, e.g. the felt *transcendency of duty over performance;* and, seizing upon these included postulates, we say —"Here is the key: this is the whole story: we have got it now in the plain demotic character; and the hieroglyphics may be rubbed out." What is the result? Much, I think, what we should expect, where the text is disparaged to glorify the interpreter: *its* thought is twisted into a mask, through which *his* eyes look out; and under the guise of ancient sage or prophet, we are confronted by the

commonplaces of to-day. Isaiah turns out to be a Martin Tupper.

Of this rationalistic reduction of religion to formulas of experience there are so many examples now-a-days as to indicate a general tendency of our time. Amid their varieties there is one cry in which all their voices concur. It is raised in Holland, but echoed everywhere. "No Metaphysics!"—which means, taken in the foreign sense of the word, "No inquiry into any *Real Being* beyond the phenomena of the world: that is a problem which, whether admitting of solution or not, is indifferent to the spiritual life of humanity: either way, Religion remains a personal and social fact, the contents and significance of which we may examine." In other words, "It is nothing to Religion whether or not there be a God! We may give theology its discharge and let it carry off all its beliefs, without prejudice to human trust and piety; these have ample support from the laws of our nature and the order amid which we are placed, without seeking any deeper base." It is no wonder that when this one common element of all known religions (for even Buddhism does not answer to the demand, "No Metaphysics!") is removed, very divergent accounts should be given of what the residuary essence really is. In *this* indeed they do agree;—that *Morality*, as next of kin to Religion, must succeed to its inheritance and take its name: only, as they have hitherto existed both together on domains by no means co-extensive and with followers far from identical, it is necessary, if the world is to feel no bereavement, to devise some transformation for morality,—to give it a step of preferment from the temporal

to the spiritual peerage, and decorate it with the ostensible symbols of sanctity. The delicate question is, what these shall be. What shall we do to morality in order to turn it into religion? 'Touch it with emotion,' says Mr. Matthew Arnold, and 'fix its eye on the *stream of tendency* as that continuous *not-ourselves* which makes for Righteousness.' Mr. Frederick Harrison has no objection to the 'emotion;' but prefers, as a Supreme Being, the idea of *collective Humanity* which claims the individual's service and weaves it into its texture for ever. The newest philosophy of Holland deems it enough that the morality shall be *ideal;* not the prosaic will of duty that toils under the burden and heat of the day, but the free flight towards visionary perfection to which midnight contemplation invites. Religion, we are assured, is "Moral Idealism."* In this definition the modern tendency finds perhaps its most exact expression: and in the following comments upon the general doctrine, its terms will be prevailingly in my thoughts.

Let it be admitted at the outset that, *within the limits of Ethics,*—if that were all the ground they claimed,—each of these teachers emphasizes an important truth. That on this scene of our life the course of things "makes for righteousness,"—that in "the stream of tendency" the defiling contents gradually subside and leave the waters purer as they flow,—that history, through all its tragedies, contains the promise of Right,—and that a firm trust in

* See the discussion on "Godsdienst zonder metaphysica" and on the "Zedelijk Ideaal," in the Theologisch Tijdschrift, 1874-5-6, by Hooykaas, van Bell, Hugenholtz, van Hamel, Kuenen, and others.

this ascending future is an indispensable support for human culture,—is a lesson so momentous, that his appreciation of it may well place Mr. Arnold high among moralists, if only it is not used as his passport of entrance among the prophets. So, again, nothing can be more seasonable than the counterpoise by which Mr. Harrison checks the sophistical egoism of the preceding English philosophers. In proof of their dictum that Pleasure is the ultimate good and the end of all action, they have usually put the case of a solitary person set up in an empty universe, and insisted that if, on arising, he had one pleasant sensation and then passed away, it would have been worth his while to exist; but if the sensation were painful, he had better not have been; so that there is nothing eligible but pleasure. The absurdity of the argument lies in its quiet assumption (under the conception of loneliness) of Individualism, and its reduction of life to mere sentiency. This creature floating in vacancy is, by hypothesis, out of relation to anything but himself: all objects, all companions, are kept out of his way: there is nothing for him to go to or to act upon: he is a self-concentrated focus, surrendered to *passivity*, which has only a sensitive value. On these terms he is not a *man at all;* nor even so much as a sponge in the sea, which at least *does something* with the water around it. The human being is first constituted by precisely the system of relations which are all here omitted: we are what we are by reciprocation: the *individual* is not the factor, but the *product*, of society; and, to understand our nature, we must reckon with humanity first as a collective and dominant organism, whence he starts forth and differentiates himself.

This independence and ascendency of the altruistic relations, with the reverent self-subordination which they enjoin to the abiding and growing life of society, are vindicated with a just enthusiasm by our eloquent Positivist;—with an effect, however, which might have been greater, had not his afflatus carried him over from philosophy to allegory, and mystified his doctrine by expressing it in terms of "the Soul and the Future Life." A still deeper truth it is which has led the extreme school in Holland to resolve religion into "Moral Idealism." They have certainly hit upon the very experience which occupies the border-ground between ethics and faith, and carries the conscience over from rules of life to inward worship. On the one hand, do I not know that, in every alternative offered to my choice, I can both see the higher course and take it, and am solemnly bound to take no other? On the other hand, do I not also know, from the sad lessons of the past, that I shall not persistently do so; and that the will *always* pure and unselfish, just and true, though for ever possible, will be for ever unrealized? This conflict between character and conception is doubtless the cradle of religion: the interval between what we are and what we are guilty for not being, is that which turns our look upwards, to see if there be hope beyond these shadows of reproach, and which makes the heart low and tender to yield to any heavenly promise that may descend. The spirit that has set into this attitude, and, in the daily round of duty, is secretly drawn on by an infinite aspiration, already waits at the gate of heaven.

But it is one thing to be brought to the verge of Religion

by sympathy with this or that part of its contents; it is another, to penetrate to its interior essence. And inasmuch as it is the aim of all these interpreters to retain the pieties of human character, while excusing themselves and us from any conscious relations with *the Living God*, I submit that they attempt what is impossible, and that the very life of Religion centres precisely in that which they discard. They feel the elevation and beauty of the best type of spiritual growth, but would fain dispense with its secret aliment and conditions. They look with wonder at the stately stem, as it springs aloft: they love the shade of the foliage: they admire the blossom;—but they cut the root. It is a repetition, at a higher level, of the mistake which the Individualists commit. These try to make a whole of the single person, and from his nature, measured in itself, to deduce a theory of his existence, though that existence is entirely made up of a tissue of relations with his kind and his theatre of being. Humanism corrects this error; yet again renews it, when it shuts up *mankind* within their reciprocal relations, and cuts them off from diviner affinities beyond. Neither ourselves, nor our race, surveyed as an island, can ever be interpreted aright: to understand what we are, and even what we contain, we must venture the embracing seas and integrate our lives with the unmeasured sphere of being.

Do I then restrict the conception of Religion to the sentiments awakened by the presence of *Infinite* Perfection, and say that, short of this point, its characteristic spirit fails? On the contrary, I trace its secret power in all

human relations where affection and duty are concerned. Reverence for character above us, at whatever height it may be, is the posture of a *religious* nature; and the aspiration it sustains, the trusts it fosters, the self-sacrifice it renders possible and light, fling into our life its fairest colours and tincture it all with sacredness. Let this devoutness of heart be free as you will: let it go everywhere and touch everything: the finite also is open to it as well as the infinite; and the minor pieties are not to retire or renounce their name before the greater. But then, for both there is this indispensable condition; viz. that the inward homage, whatever its direction, shall alight upon a *real object*, and not lose itself in the dilution of an endless search. When I am awed and subdued before the grace and grandeur of a moral superior, it is not because he *suggests*, but because he *realizes*, a higher conception of excellence: it is as a living agent, as a personal embodiment, of righteousness, that he wields authority over my conscience. Take away this element, tear the picture out of the volume of true history and cast it to the transient winds of imagination, and all is immediately changed. The image remaining the same, I may still admire; but no longer in grave silence,—rather with outspoken praise: of my compunction I am relieved: the strength of resolution is relaxed: the "lifting power" of a devout enthusiasm is gone; and if I have gained any new variety of thought, it is simply added to my culture, but does not transform my life. A conception which reports itself as empty of reality, even if it startles us into a momentary

awe, can no more receive our reverent embrace than the shade of a departed ancestor or guide;

> Frustra comprensa manus effugit imago,
> Par levibus ventis, volucrique simillima somno.

There is nothing to sustain the worshipful influence of its presence: we cannot venerate our own idea. *Here* it is that "Moral Idealism" falls short of the conditions of Religion; not because it is ethical, while religion is something else; not because it works among finite relations, while religion is concerned only with the infinite; but because its ideal perfection is known to be only in our heads, while the ideal of religion must be also real. Strauss himself makes the memorable confession, that "none but a book-student could ever imagine that a creation of the brain, woven of poetry and philosophy, can take the place of real Religion."*

To mark then the step of thought which crosses the line into the hemisphere of Religion:—it is made when we affirm that over us and in relation to us the All-perfect Mind *exists.* Devout faith is a belief of *real Being* on the strength of *what ought to be.* If you look at it from the outside, you may call it the apotheosis of moral aspiration: if you name it from the interior, you will say, it is the revelation of God in the conscience. The former expression describes the ascent of my thought to its object; the latter, the descent of its object into my thought. As my purpose is at present only to clear the meaning and scope of words which are made mischievous by indeterminate

* Kaiser Julien; der Romantiker auf dem Throne der Cäsaren, S. 12.

use, I will not pause to vindicate the drawing of an ontological conclusion from a moral premiss. It is not the only paradox of Reason into which we are irresistibly borne away by that wonderful conception of what *ought to be.* It introduces many convictions against which the logic of physical science is for ever chafing; but which take no notice of the rebuff, and continue to be bases of social law and invisible bonds of human life. To these criticisms, if time permits, I will devote a few words before I close. Just now I rest on the position that "Moral Idealism" is not Religion, unless the ideal is held to be *Real* as well as *Divine.*

To test this position, suppose the element of *Reality* to be now admitted, and now removed; and compare the natural working of the moral ideal under the two conditions; to see whether in both instances alike it is marked by the effects which experience shows to be characteristic of religion.

Ever since the Epistle to the Romans was written, it has become a Christian commonplace that, in all moral experience, I am divided against myself; inwardly identified with a superior call that beckons me; outwardly liable to take my lot with the inferior inclination that clings to me. In such conflict, whatever be its issue, the *real* self is always that which votes for the good; conformably with Plato's rule, that no man, *of his own will* (though, possibly, of blind impulse), ever decides for the worse. If I choose aright, the previous strife is laid to rest, and my nature is at one with itself and its own ends. If I choose amiss, the storm within is fiercer than before; I rage against my

own temptation; and if the fact be known, I am ashamed to walk abroad and carry about so false an image of myself. And thus it is with all men, so far as the moral life has developed its history in them. Set before them a just and righteous claim that demands them, and, if only you get the conception clear into their hearts, they are caught up into one spirit at the appeal, and muster as an army fresh from sleep. They feel, perhaps for the first time, that they are themselves,—that they never knew themselves before. They have emerged from a disguising cloud, and beneath the sunshine their very essence has found them out. With all of us then, in some deep sense, the ideal self is the truly Real; and we disown as foreign whatever contradicts it.

Yet, in another sense, it is just this which is *unreal;* for it is never *realized:* it is something still *to be,* which not yet *is.* If you ask for the *actual* self, now and here, to-day and to-morrow, of each individual, it will be precisely that which he repudiates as the false one; wherein the struggle is *not over,* the temptation not banished, the unity not attained. Unless therefore fact itself is illusion, this other and relatively *evil* self is that which *really is,* both in each of us and in society. Yet, strange to say, it encounters a fate which befalls no other fact. Its right *to be a phenomenon* is disputed. Real as it is, it is *condemned for being there,* and has to skulk before an eternal protest which treats it as *marring reality,* and bids it take itself away.

What meaning then is to be put upon these two aspects of Reality, leading us at once to affirm and to deny it of the same object? To the Theist, the paradox easily resolves

itself. That the moral consciousness on the one hand, and the observation of fact on the other, should give two measures of reality, does not surprise him. He sees in them only reflexions in little of two corresponding functions of the universe at large;—viz. indwelling thought, ideal purpose, free creativeness, determining it towards all beauty and good; and finite material conditions for the externalization and progressive expression of its spiritual origin and end:—i.e. *Mind*, eternally perfect; and *Nature*, perfectible by transition;—the one for ever *being*, the other only *becoming* (therefore partly *not* being) what it *ought to be*. Where the great whole consists of this permanent essence of reality and its partial negation, it is intelligible that both should report themselves in our derivative nature, and in their very lineaments claim their respective parentage, and by their native sympathies tend towards their home. In such a world there is no uncertain meaning in that consciousness of *a higher* that possesses me,—that sense of *authority* which every opening of duty brings,—that almost speaking appeal to my will that tells me, "This alone is right, and thou canst do it,"—that terrible conviction incurred by all wrong-doing, that I have lost *myself* and become alienated from an infinitely better than myself. These experiences necessarily belong to the relation between the opening conscience of an incipiently free humanity and the righteousness of an eternally free and holy God. We simply accept them, therefore, as telling us the truth: we *believe* our compunction, and have nothing to explain away in it: we do not construe it into a vain and illusory regret for what *had to be*, or think to rid ourselves of its demands

by some apology or reparation to our fellows; but own to the full its grievous charge, of a dereliction of a Divine trust, and shrink abashed before the eye of the Supreme Perfection.

At the same time, the consciousness that what I have realized in act is not the true real, assures me that it has no roots and cannot stand; and that, just because I know this, I am not without the idea and love of that to which I have been faithless: so that the sacred affinity remains; the relation is not abolished; and hope springs up afresh. The local clouds of violated conscience cannot blot out the steadfast expression of eternal Will, all-embracing as the heavens: its everlasting eyes are over all, and know how to find the visual points in every answering mind. This objective persistence of a living Holiness is just the one steadying and sustaining power which condenses flying humours into force of conscience, and animates the waking toils of life with the glow of its divinest dreams. The women whom you could not frighten, and the men whom you could not move to say the false or do the wrong,—have they not been pre-eminently (I do not say exclusively) those who stood face to face with the Living Judge of Right, and in their own incorruptible perception heard His voice—"Stand fast, for I am with you"?—a voice which at once guarantees the possibility and completes the sanctity of the felt duty. Is it possible to deny that such conviction, with the habits of inward piety which it creates, naturally imparts stability to the will and elevation to the affections?

But this conviction, we are told, is "Metaphysical:" it affirms an existence beyond phenomena; and from our religion we are to take all Metaphysics away. Be it so: then our "Moral Idealism" loses its objective hold, and becomes a mere subjective exercise of imagination: and the question is whether this will still serve as well. The change (may we not say?) amounts to a removal of the ideal from the moral to the æsthetic field; whereby, though it may fix my admiration, it parts with all immediate relation to my will; for it contains in it no assurance of either its *authority* or its *possibility*, any more than is contained in the artist's dream of a statue nobler than the Apollo, or a picture more touching than the San Sisto. The bare conception of a better in character, rising in the imagination and known to be an imagination, no more touches the springs of action with the sense of what I ought to do and be, than the conception of brighter wits or finer person or happier lot. Any vain longing which it may excite is but like the wish that last night's dream were not *only* a dream, and is as likely to depress me with a nerveless feeling of inferiority as to lift me into strenuous faith. It is the peculiarity of the visions of conscience,—that which marks them off from all other play of ideality,—that they cannot be purely egoistic, and in becoming such would drop their very essence; that to a lonely, unrelated mind they would be intrinsically impossible; that they profess to come to us upon a mission, to destroy our absolutism and plant us beneath a higher which has a right to the homage of our will. If this profession be not true, the

moral insight itself becomes illusory; and to detect the fraud thus put upon us is simply to break the back of all moral power, and release the will from every pressure graver than the light weights of fancy. What seemed to be looking at us with such Divine appealing eyes is but a flattered portrait of ourselves: the tones that so deeply pierced us are but our own falsetto voice: there is neither substance in the sight, nor truth in the sound: let us pass on, as though they were not. Life, upon such terms, would be like one of those dual games, of chess or cards, in which a solitary player cheats his loneliness by personating the pair, and suffers a fictitious defeat by his own intentional mistake, and wins a hollow triumph by outwitting himself. It no less *takes two* to deliver the game of Duty from trivial pretence and give it an earnest interest. How can I look up to myself as the higher that reproaches me?—issue commands to myself which I dare not disobey?—ask forgiveness from myself for sins which myself has committed?—surrender to myself with a martyr's sacrifice?—and go through all the drama of moral conflict and enthusiasm between myself in a mask and myself in propriâ personâ? How far are these "emotional" semblances, these battles in the clouds, to carry their mimickry of reality? Are we to *worship* the self-ideality? to *pray* to an empty image in the air? to trust, in sorrow, a creation of thought which is but a phenomenon of sorrow? No: if religious communion is reduced to a monologue, its essence is extinct and its soul is gone. It is a living relation, or it is nothing;—a response to the Supreme Reality. And vainly will you

search for your spiritual dynamics without the Rock Eternal for your ποῦ στῶ.

But perhaps it will be said that the moral ideal, when traced through its history, is not purely subjective, although at present a phenomenon of the individual consciousness; since it comes to us from minds other than our own; both concentrating and reflecting the social sentiment by whose light we see and in whose air we breathe; and also storing up an indefinite inheritance of ancestral judgments of character, not only transmitted by descent, but looking down on us from the portrait-galleries of history and permeating the whole substance of literature. The standards of excellence to which admiration and reverence turn have actually formed themselves, it is urged, outside of us: they are not personal inventions which we might weave *in vacuo;* but are presented to us as the objective fruit of human experience, the last distillation of good when all foreign ingredients are left behind; and it is not therefore without reason that we refuse to interpret them as egoisms, and feel them as claims upon us rather than as fancies within us. They *do* speak to us with an external authority: but this authority it is enough to treat as *social*, without attributing to it anything transcendental and divine. Why may we not, it is asked, set our foot on this reality, and so regain the missing power? This objection proceeds from those who regard the moral sentiment as communicated rather than indigenous,—as partly borrowed in our own time from other minds, and partly a legacy in our organism from a long past. They are ready to assent to Mr. Sidg-

wick's statement that "on the conception of the objectivity of duty the authority of the moral sentiment depends;"* but think that, since *they* have detected its rudiments and conditions of growth in external experience, *its* conception of the objectivity of duty is provided for and justified. The fallacy is obvious. It is one thing for a sentiment to owe its existence to outward conditions; it is another to carry in its meaning an objective reference: to grow from without inwards is not to look from within outwards; and the objectivity we here investigate is not in the genesis of the conception, but in its contents. Its inherent *belief* of an authority beyond us is not explained by discovering for the sentiment a foreign origin, physiological and psychological, of which we are wholly unconscious. The discovery is *yours*, not *ours;* and its very merit for your genius depends on its having been a secret to our thought. The objective sources of our moral feeling are absolutely hidden from it: its objective authority is absolutely clear to it: to identify the two is to affirm that the same thing may be simultaneously in consciousness and out of it.

Suppose, however, the fallacy removed from this analysis by our becoming conscious of the actual origin of our moral ideal, viz. progenitors in the past, society in the present; so that, thus far, there is no hindrance to our finding in them the "objective authority," the "imperative" rule independent of our own feelings, which the sense of duty

* Methods of Ethics: Supplement to 1st Edition, p. 45. See also 1st Ed. p. 62. "That in us which claims authority is never a mere sentiment, but always a faculty cognizant of an objective rule or imperative which exists independently of its effect on our feelings."

carries in it. Still, there is another fatal disqualification in them for recognition as the real object of our reverence and the ideal standard of our aspirations. They are simply the general aggregate of social sentiment in our own and prior generations, the average of expected character through the ages of which we are the sons: for no means are suggested for filtering the descending stream and dropping its impurities as it flows,—its animal taint, its false admirations, its bitter selfishness,—and securing for us only the sweet waters of life. Can we say then that what is *thus* presented to us is *higher* than we,—higher, moreover, than our noblest and best men, in whom also and with intenser eye the conscience retains its upward look? No: historical and actual Society constitutes, by its opinions, a force larger indeed, stronger, more enduring than we; but not even approaching our own ideal, much less passing away beyond it towards infinitude. Nay more: social opinions are either the expression of conscience already there, and then they are the effect of the very ideal they are supposed to form; or, they tell simply what men like and dislike and mean to insist upon with each other; and then they are not moral at all; the influence which proceeds from them is coercive only, not sacred,—compressing reluctant wills, but releasing none into a free enthusiasm. The objectivity, therefore, which is supplied to us by this doctrine is of the wrong kind for drawing forth the homage of reverent affection, and can offer only the blankest disappointment to any true moral idealism.

Besides, if the object in which the authority rests is a continuous and universal social will, it is for us a mere

abstraction, in resorting to which we are aware that it is a figment or economy of thought, which cannot really exercise rights over us or claim any rational veneration. However subject we may be to impose upon ourselues by giving substance to such mental creations, they can never wield over us the power of concrete being, unless within their epitome images gleam forth of individual persons and visible scenes that have become endeared. Thus there is a magic in such words as *home* and *country*, through the generality of which faces look at us and fields and villages are seen: and these may become the occasion of some minor idolatries of the heart, shaping themselves however into the innocent forms of conscious personification and fervent song. But abstractions which have no such contents,—e.g. Law, Reason, Wealth, Opinion,—whatever pranks they may play with our Logic,—cannot persuade us to bow down and worship them. If the only *object* you have to offer for human homage be an impersonal conception of this kind, it is easy to see what will become of our religion under the change. We have only to substitute for the familiar terms of personal piety, which speak of "God" and the human "Soul," any of their supposed modern equivalents when the "Metaphysics" are discharged, and then estimate the gain or loss. Will then the Benedicite swell with the same tones of joy, when it has to sing—"Bless the *Eternal Law*, all ye its works; bless the Eternal Law, O my synthesis of organs"? Will the contrition which now cries—"Blot out my transgressions," "Cast me not away," "A broken heart Thou dost not despise," pour out its sorrows to a deaf "ideal," and shed its passionate

tears on an abstraction that cannot wipe them away? Will any moonlit form be seen kneeling in our Gethsemanes, and rising from prostrate anguish to sublime repose through the prayer, "O thou *Eternal Not-ourselves that makest for righteousness*, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt"? Will any Crucified one lose the bitterness of Death in crying, "*O Stream of Tendency*, into thy hands I commit my spirit"? And to the Martyr, stoned to death, will any Heaven open and any Vision come, when he exclaims, "*Great Ensemble of Humanity*, receive me"? For my part, I cherish the hope that our unsatisfied "Modern Thinker," after vain trial of such devotions, may return to his rest, and say with a natural reversion of heart, "O Thou once Unknown, I thank Thee that though Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, Thou hast revealed them unto babes."

Our comparison then of the effects on life of the subjective and objective ideal sums itself up in this: that without *personal relations* between the Human and the Divine, Religion is divested of all its higher attributes and intenser forces: it loses its link with morals: it ceases to transfigure the affections: it relinquishes its grasp upon the will. It was by emphasizing these relations that Judaism became indomitable; and by universalizing them that Christianity laid hold of the foremost nations and rose into the foremost faith of mankind; creating and diffusing a heart-worship, a self-reverence and self-surrender, a depth of spiritual experience, a literature of character and devotion, and a breadth of social compassion, which are the redeeming features of modern civilization. To paralyze these relations is

to relapse into Paganism,—a Paganism, too, with emptying temples and retreating gods,—and to set up again the mutual play of Man and Nature, with the sanctity lost from both. The needs of the future cannot be provided for by any such helpless reaction, which forfeits what we have gained by reversion to what has been discarded; but only by ascending to a more commanding point, whence contrasts melt in harmony, and the outlooks to the right and to the left are embraced in one horizon and form but undulations of one world.

An undertone of pathetic regret may sometimes be heard in even the most confident critics of Christian Theism; as if, in substituting their abstractions, they were conscious in their hearts of administering a dangerous anæsthetic to Religion, which might leave it speechless and paralytic, if it even survived at all. They plead, however, that the risk must be run; and that, to save any remnant of moral life, the organism of faith must suffer excision of some members which have hitherto been the seat of an intense vitality. Men have always taken for granted that the Supreme Power "thinks and loves;" but the critics have now laid it down that these predicates "cannot be *verified*,"—a dictum which, giving no account of itself, relies for its effect on mere supercilious iteration. If, in Mr. Arnold's vocabulary, to "verify" means to "*test by experiment*," the complaint is true, but irrelevant: the inner attributes of the Supreme Cause cannot be submitted to Baconian experiments, with registered results tabulated under "Sic" and "Non." Yet their exemption from this criterion does not discredit their existence: for if a Divine Mind were really

there, and in its essence were purely and only Thought and Love, it would equally transcend the interrogations of our experience. It is not by such methods that spiritual truths can be extorted. But if "*to justify by sufficient reason*" is here equivalent to "verification," the complaint, though relevant, is unfounded: for we are guided by no other reason in attributing thought and love to our fellow-men than that which warrants our ascription of them to God. In neither case have we any *immediate* apprehension of these invisible affections of mind: in *that* degree of closeness they are known only as exercised by ourselves: in others we read them only by having thus learned their signs; and precisely the signs which assure us that we are not in a mad-house, but among companions directed by intelligence and moved by sympathy, repeat themselves in the legible order, beauty, and tendencies of the world. *So* similar are the marks in the two instances, that if intellect and feeling are allowed their causality in the one, legitimate induction (as Mr. Mill himself insists) requires their admission in the other: they must operate in both, or else in neither. How cogent this resemblance is, curiously appears from the fact that, with our modern men of science, it has become usual to accept this dilemma; and, as they will not admit Mind to be operative in Nature, they actually deny its efficiency in us. Both are automata alike; and all would go on the same, mechanically unrolling the scenery of life and history, though the superfluous appendage of consciousness were cut off. It is beyond the scope of my subject to criticise this pretended completion, but real subversion, of the philosophy of Descartes. Far

be it from me to deny that in this, its last exploit, Reason has fairly done for itself and proved its own inefficacy. The interest of the speculation for the present consists in this—that the parallelism between the Universe and Man is plainly indestructible; that the exclusion of intellectual power from Nature cancels it also in us; and that its self-assertion in us rationally secures its presence and its sway in Nature. If Nature is automatic only, so are we: if we are actuated by thought and love, so is Nature. The parallelism used to be denied: it is now admitted; and the ultimate "verification" is thrown back upon our fundamental self-knowledge of action from purpose and affection. There we may be content to leave it.

I conclude, therefore, as I began, with deprecating the separation between what are called the "Metaphysics" and the Ethics of our supreme beliefs. These beliefs, whose fertilizing influence is first felt far lower down, are found, when followed upwards to their springs, to have two co-ordinate sources,—one in the intellectual, the other in the moral region of our nature; the former bringing us to a transcendent *Cause;* the latter, to a transcendent *Righteousness;* together finding their unity in an Eternal *Will.* The exigencies of thought in dealing with its ultimate problems may require us, and the artifices of analysis may enable us, to contemplate them as distinct, and assign to them their respective lines of descent upon and through the mind and character. But this detachment is *our* work, not *theirs;*—not a fact of life, but an illusion of the schools. In the common sense and feeling of men, and in the faith of Christ, they perfectly blend, and in blending support

and complete each other; and no such strange paradox meets us, as the conception of a Universal Cause that has no character, or a Perfect Righteousness that has no Causality. The final object of the Reason and the final home of the Conscience are the same: these faculties are but the two wings that bear us thither; and if you disable either, we vainly struggle and never rise. Religion that is *mere* metaphysics offers us but a pale and icy reality: "Religion *without* metaphysics" offers us but a painted dream.

The truth of which the new doctrine is a caricature is perhaps this:—that the *progressive element* of Religion is to be found in an ever-expanding moral ideal as human experience enlarges and the human conscience increases its refinement and its range. New social perplexities of duty, new sufferings for compassion, new virtues for veneration, new temptations for conquest, enter the field as the ages open, and leave the old formulas of righteous life inadequate: and in nothing will a true piety show itself more than in freely embracing its more comprehensive trust, and suffering no filaments of habit to detain it from a higher perfectness. On the ontological side of Religion, —in the conception of Primal Being and Power,—there is no such process of advance: it is a fixed thought, and, as a necessary idea of Reason, does not add to its contents, but remains "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Precisely, however, on this account is it the indispensable substratum for the moving images and varying colours of goodness and beauty as they unfold. Without a permanent there can be no change; and the ideal which for ever grows must in its essence be secured upon the Real. It is idle

to talk of evolution and laws of phenomenal advance, as if they superseded all beyond themselves. "Phenomena" of nothing, "Evolution" of emptiness,—what are such phrases but a Greek and Latin gibberish? To make a show of itself, there must be something behind: to develope itself, there must be a plenitude within: the very words bespeak the whole reality they are intended to deny.

And unless we are to throw away all idea of homogeneity and proportion between cause and effect, and between instinctive tendency and its fulfilment, the Rational and the Moral in us can neither have their beginning nor reach their end, in the absence of Divine Reason and Divine Right. If our human experience teaches us anything certain, it is this: that it is Thought which kindles thought, and Love which elicits love, and Character which moulds and refines character; and *that*, not *upwards*, the inferior prevailing to better the superior; but *downwards*, the greater lifting the less. To reverse this order, to educe Mind from what is not yet mind, and Conscience from blind and neutral force, is to put more into the effect than the cause provides, and *ipso facto* to convict the explanation of incompetency. And similarly when we face round to see whither our nature looks instead of whence it comes, we find not an appetency, affection, or energy of our being, that fails to meet its fitting *object*: through the range of the animal, the domestic, the social life, the several relations, of which one term is within us, complete themselves by hitting upon the other in the external scene. The scientific intellect slakes its thirst on the order and beauty of the world; and even when it ventures, in sympathy with the

style of nature, on guesses and forecasts too daring for immediate belief, its vaticinations have often struck the truth. Is then this analogy to be first broken when we reach the highest levels of our humanity? Are we *there* flung out of all relations, though still furnished with their inward drift and cry?—still sent to seek, with prejudgment that we shall not find? If we are to assume any concinnity in our nature, or any harmony of it with its theatre of being, such disappointment of its ends carries in it an improbability revolting to the Reason. And can then the "Moral Idealism" step in and deliver us? Yes; if it speaks to us, not in its own name, but in that of its Inspirer; if it stands before the Living God, taking thence its inner power and sending thither its secret prayer, and can utter its prophecies as foregleams of His righteous Will. At such a voice, Conscience becomes transfigured from human to Divine, and life on earth is turned into a "kingdom of heaven." But if, because its God is dead, it can only display its own imaginings, and propose them in tones of personal suggestion, without an organic faith to integrate them with the possible and the intended, it will wield no persuasive influence, but speak as a prophet ere yet the live coal has touched his lips. Its visions will pale and fade; its promises dissolve in unreality; and the sickened conscience that has trusted to it, sink into helpless debility. Human life is too strong for the grasp of spiritual æsthetics: let it remain within the hold of the All-ruling hand.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR,

Price 2/6, New Edition,

RELIGION AS AFFECTED BY MODERN MATERIALISM.

AND

MODERN MATERIALISM: ITS ATTITUDE TOWARDS THEOLOGY.

Or separately, 1/- and 1/6 respectively.

WILLIAMS & NORGATE, 14, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden.

Also, price 21/- cloth,

ESSAYS, PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL.

In Two Volumes.

TRÜBNER & Co., Ludgate Hill.

Also, price 7/6, cloth,

ENDEAVOURS AFTER THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Sixth Edition.

LONGMANS & Co., 39, Paternoster Row.

Also, price 7/6, cloth,

HOURS OF THOUGHT ON SACRED THINGS.

Second Edition.

LONGMANS & Co., 39, Paternoster Row.

Also, price 7/6, cloth,

STUDIES OF CHRISTIANITY.

A Series of Original Papers.

LONGMANS & Co., 39, Paternoster Row.